

LATINO & PUERTO RICAN
AFFAIRS COMMISSION

LPRAC



CALP

COMISION DE ASUNTOS
LATINOS Y PUERTORRIQUEÑOS

Legislative Agenda 2009

Access to:

Resources

Opportunities

Decision-Makers

As part of its mission to positively affect the advancement of the state's Latino and Puerto Rican communities, the LPRAC has established a firm set of legislative priorities. It is the belief of the LPRAC that testifying and advocating for change in these areas will affect the lives of thousands of Latinos in communities throughout the state.

Mission Statement



Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission Membership

Carlos Alvarez, Chairperson
Ivette Servera, Vice Chair
Sonia P. Ayala, Treasurer
Pablo Rivera, Secretary
Manuel García, Past Chair

Ramón L Arroyo, Commissioner
Enrique Marcano, Sr., Commissioner
Luis A. Menéndez, Commissioner
Alcidez Ortiz, Commissioner
Juan M. Perez, Commissioner
Ed Rodríguez, Commissioner
Norma Rodríguez-Reyes, Commissioner
Maritza Tirú, Commissioner

Priorities and Legislation Committee Membership

Commissioner Ed Rodríguez, Committee Chair
LPRAC Chairman Carlos Alvarez, Ex-Officio member
Commissioner Luis A. Menéndez, Commissioner
Norma Rodríguez-Reyes
Werner Oyanadel, Principal Legislative Analyst – Committee staff
Lina Lorenzi, Esq. Legislative Analyst, II – Committee staff

The Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC) was created by the legislature of the State of Connecticut through Public Act 94-152, taking effect on February 1st, 1995. LPRAC is part of the legislative branch of government and governed by section 2-120 of the Connecticut General Statutes – and as amended by Public Act 03-229. The duties of the Commission are to review and comment on any proposed State legislation and regulations that would affect the Latino and Puerto Rican populations in the State; advise and provide information to the Governor on the State's policies concerning the Latino and Puerto Rican communities; advise the Governor concerning the coordination and administration of State programs serving the Latino and Puerto Rican populations; maintain a liaison between the Latino and Puerto Rican communities and governmental entities; encourage Latino and Puerto Rican representation at all levels of State government, including State boards and commissions; secure appropriate recognition of the accomplishments and contributions of the Latino and Puerto Rican populations of the State; and prepare and submit an annual report concerning its activities with any appropriate recommendations concerning the Latino and Puerto Rican populations in the State.

Methodology

This document is prepared by the Priorities and Legislation Committee of the LPRAC with the assistance of the LPRAC staff. This committee is guided by article VIII, Section 1 (a) of the LPRAC by-laws, which stipulate that, "this committee shall investigate proposals in order to determine their priority for Commission action." The committee, through this report, also responds to Public Act 03-229, which mandates that the LPRAC work in consultation with the leaders of the Legislature on a short and long term plan with the objective of improving the socio-economic foundation of Latino families residing in the state.

The committee members and staff utilized several tools to develop this document some of which included a thorough review of legislative research documents from the Office of Legislative Research from the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA), state and national literature from non-partisan think-tank agencies such as the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, National Council of La Raza, the 2008 Almanac of Latino Politics prepared by the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute, National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, Black and Latino Caucus of the CGA, Connecticut Voices for Children, Latino Policy Institute, ASPIRA of Connecticut, and the Immigrant and Refugee Coalition. Furthermore, the committee reviewed literature or participated in legislative committees from state agencies such as the Connecticut State Department of Education, State of Connecticut Office of Business Advocate, Small Business Development Center, and the State Department of Economic & Community Development. Finally, the committee also reviewed data from the 2007 Latino Socio-Economic Study prepared for the LPRAC by the Center for Research & Public Policy and Seeds of Prosperity: Children of Low-Income Working Families 2006 Connecticut Kids Count Data Book.

This document is organized into two sections; section one includes the Committees short-term proposals and the second section includes a comprehensive list of issues that the committee is recommending to the Governor and to the CGA for change in the long term.

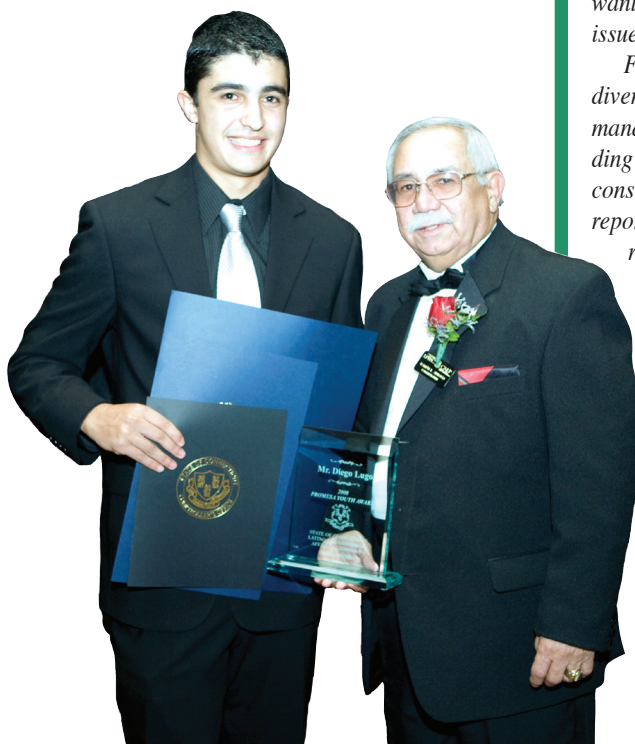


the Bu-
of Economic



Latino entrepreneurs making investments in Connecticut are feeling the weight of this economic crisis and are going to need access to capital and credit to stay competitive.

— Carlos Alvarez



Message

from the Commission Chair
and Committee Chair



On behalf of all the members of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC), it gives us great pleasure to present to you the LPRAC's 2009 Legislative Agenda.

At the beginning of last year, the LPRAC released the fourth edition of the Latino Socio-Economic Status study, which alerted policy makers of a declining standard of living for Latinos in Connecticut. This survey indicated that the most pressing issues for Latinos were tax relief, high health care costs, and education reform. Moreover, the LPRAC stood side by side with the Hispanic Health Council when they informed the Connecticut legislature, about a year ago, of an existing health crisis affecting disproportionately the Latino population. All of these alerts happened prior to the home mortgage meltdown of 2008 which generated another set of economic problems across the country. All in all, the LPRAC believes this recession, if nothing appropriately is done, will disproportionately affect the Latino community and that is a cost the state cannot afford to undertake.

It is within this context that the LPRAC recommends that the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) provides tax relief, strengthen state services that aim to help families during this recession, reshuffle state priorities to be able to afford education reform legislation and provide affordable health care coverage for all state residents. In specific, the state should suspend foreclosure sales for six months, and continue funding Latino agencies that provide job training for the unemployed, food and shelter to the homeless, health care coverage to the uninsured and after school programs for the youth.

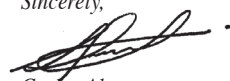
The LPRAC also recommends that Connecticut policy makers prioritize legislation that endeavors to help Latino businesses strive during a national economic downturn and a worsening credit crisis. Latino entrepreneurs making investments in Connecticut are feeling the weight of this economic crisis and are going to need access to capital to stay competitive. Recently, Governor Rell announced a \$100 Million loan program for Connecticut businesses as part of the Governor's "Four-Point" Credit Plan to ensure the continued free flow of credit in the state's economy. The LPRAC is supportive of this plan; however, the LPRAC does not believe that these funds are trickling down to Latino businesses, therefore we urge the Governor to ensure that this growing segment of the industry have equal access to those resources already available.

Furthermore, the LPRAC will reach-out to the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus of the CGA to work on ways to increase judicial nominations of minority judges serving on Connecticut state courts; LPRAC wants to work with the leadership of the CGA on legislation that helps Latino immigrant families on issues of higher-education, hate crimes, and domestic violence.

Finally, the LPRAC will make recommendations to state appointing authorities about the need to diversify the State of Connecticut's boards, and commissions. It is one of the LPRAC's most important mandates to "encourage Latino and Puerto Rican representation at all levels of state government, including state boards and commissions" and a major requirement of the law is that appointing authorities consider gender and race when making their appointments. However, from the latest racial composition report released by the Secretary of the State, there was insignificant change in representation of minority groups between 2005 and 2007. In both years, members of minority groups were significantly underrepresented. Specifically for our community, although the population increased from around 9.4 percent to 11.2 percent during this period, our representation for boards and commission went from 3.1 percent to 3.2 percent – a disappointing score card.

The LPRAC looks forward to working in partnership with the Governor and the CGA to address and solve the problems affecting the Latino community. As the legislative mandate that created the LPRAC states, we have been and continue to be ready to work with the Governor; all that we ask is to be invited to the table as a partner and active contributor. Finally, the LPRAC strongly urges the Governor to increase access to capital, opportunities, and to the decision-makers when important choices are being made that affect this growing segment of the population.

Sincerely,


Carlos Alvarez,
LPRAC Chair


Ed Rodríguez,
Committee Chair

Short term Recommendations



Latino Businesses/ Entrepreneur Support

According to the Small Business Administration, there are about 12,970 Latino-owned businesses in Connecticut as of 2007. The Latino purchasing power in Connecticut is estimated to be about 9 billion dollars. Minority-owned businesses are growing at more than six times the rate of all firms in the United States and nearly twice the rate of all firms in annual sales. A study conducted by the Urban Institute found that Minority Business Enterprise (MBE)

receive only 57 cents for every dollar they would be expected to get from governmental contracting. Connecticut State procurement programs consist of a certification process and a registry of MBEs to be used by state agencies in advertising bidding opportunities. Some states like Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, and Connecticut have laws that include specific targets for minority participation. Connecticut's current MBE procurement goal is twenty percent of the allotted amount to small businesses.

The LPRAC is currently working with the Governor of the State of Connecticut, the leadership of the Connecticut General Assembly, the various statewide Hispanic Business and Merchants Associations (such as SAMA) and with the Small Business Administration (SBA) on ways to increase access to opportunities for Latino entrepreneurs. Our main premise is that Latino businesses receive a much smaller percentage of government contracts than do other firms and that many of the larger state contracts are given to out of state companies rather than companies doing business in Connecticut. The LPRAC will advocate this session ensuring that the funds already available for small minority businesses get appropriately dispersed to those small Connecticut based businesses and specifically those of Latino descent.

Safety-net programs

The LPRAC informed the Connecticut General Assembly at the beginning of 2008, based on the results of our fourth edition of the Latino Socio-Economic Status Report done in 2007, that there were significant indicators that were signaling a recession for Latinos living in the state. At that time, we advocated for the use of the "Rainy Day Fund" to help the Latino community through a recession. The CGA created a budget reserve known as the "Rainy Day" fund in 1978 to help the state overcome economic downturns. Unfortunately, our recommendation to use this fund was not acted upon at the time despite an increase in the unemployment rate for Latinos. The state,

in our opinion, should not cut funding for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, services to the homeless, or other basic state services aimed for the poor in the state. The state should avoid cutting services to Latino agencies providing food, instruction, and shelter to Latino families who are struggling to make ends meet. It is imperative that lawmakers make the appropriate budget choices in light of the shifting demographics and economic conditions which can easily spiral into a larger crisis.

Home Mortgage Foreclosure Moratorium

The Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission supports Governor Rell's proposed six month moratorium on home foreclosures in Connecticut. The Governor will also propose additional protection for renters who have fallen victim to landlords in foreclosure. Moreover, the Governor's plan includes stemming the tide of affected neighborhoods falling into further decay through the use of \$25 million in federal dollars. These funds will be targeted for use in cities and towns hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis. The federal funds would be used to purchase, rehabilitate, and sell foreclosed properties. The Governor's plan also makes the Judicial Branch's voluntary mediation program for borrowers mandatory.

Latino homeowners and renters have been hit hard in the Connecticut foreclosure crisis. The sub-prime mortgage fiasco has caused Latino homeowners and renters to lose their residences in record numbers. The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now stated in their 2004 study entitled Predatory Lending in America that there has been a greater concentration of sub-prime loans in minority neighborhoods than mixed-race or majority-white neighborhoods. At its height, the use of sub-prime loans by homeowners who lived in neighborhoods in which minorities constituted 80-100% of the population were 3.8 times more likely to receive a sub-prime loan when refinancing than homeowners who lived in neighborhoods where minorities were less than 20% of the population. This past June, Senator Duff (D-Norwalk) stated "Connecticut has the tenth highest number of fore-

closures on the books in the country. New Haven is ranked 35 out of the 100 top metro-area foreclosure rates. The Bridgeport, Stamford and Norwalk metro area comes in at number 45, and Hartford is holding at number 51." All of these areas have high concentrations of Latinos.

Governor Rell's plan calls for greater assistance to a group that has become the collateral damage of the foreclosure crisis, renters. The Governor's plan would mandate that tenants living in built-



dings with five or fewer units receive notice from landlords within seven days of the landlord receiving a foreclosure notice or filing for bankruptcy. To date, tenants have for the most part received notice when the building is taken in foreclosure by the lender and the tenant in turn receives a notice to quit. With ousted tenants and foreclosed homeowners both vying for the same rental properties, rents in Connecticut's poorest

neighborhoods continue to soar. According to HOMEConnecticut's 2008 Status Report, "Because of tighter credit, homeownership may be harder to attain, forcing more people to rent, so rental costs are expected to rise faster in the next 1-2 years." The paucity of affordable housing inevitably contributes to the rise in homelessness in Connecticut. According to the 2008 Point in Time Count Homelessness across Connecti-

cut has risen 13% in the past year alone. This is consistent with the lack of affordable housing in Connecticut and survey responses indicating that rent problems have contributed to homelessness.

For all the reasons stated, the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission urges all legislators to support Governor Rell's plan for a six month moratorium on foreclosures.

Long term Recommendations

Education

It is very clear to the majority of experts in the field, that if current population trends continue to increase, and policymakers do not improve the instruction of all racial and ethnic groups, the skills of the workforce and the income of all Connecticut State residents will likely decline over the next two decades. Connecticut, unfortunately, has one of the largest achievement gaps in the United States. In 2007 the Black and Latino Caucus reported that the State has made very limited progress creating standards and better outcomes for minority students.

In the upcoming session state lawmakers will make important decisions about how to balance the state biennium budget amidst a significant deficit. The LPRAC believes that the State of Connecticut should consider making investments in the educational system. The long-term results of these investments will likely create a domino effect of improvements for this population that in turn could decrease poverty and create opportunities for a vibrant and growing economy. In the past few years, the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Mark K. McQuillan began a five-year Comprehensive Plan for Education Reform in Connecticut. The Connecticut plan, as it has been explained to the LPRAC, would include stricter education requirements with students required to pass standardized tests in several subjects and produce a final project before graduation. Additionally, the plan asks for changes to begin in middle school and would create an individualized plan of study for all students. The implementation part of this reform was suspended until 2011 due to the budget shortfalls. The content of the plan, however, is scheduled to move forward this upcoming session. The LPRAC will work with the legislature's Education Committee and with the State Department of Education making sure that the appropriate alternatives for students not meeting these new requirements are set in place. The LPRAC will also work to ensure that the new secondary school curriculum provides college preparation for Latino students and increases the number of k-12 teachers who are culturally and linguistically competent to work with English Language Learners.

The LPRAC will also advocate in support of Early Childhood education, support quality dual-language, multi-cultural education and after-school community programs such as ASPIRA of Connecticut, which services almost 2000 children in areas such as Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain and Stamford just to mention a few.

Health

Universal Health Care

Despite high work participation rates, a significant proportion of the Latino population in Connecticut is uninsured and does not benefit from either private or public insurance. Currently, 32 percent of Latinos don't have insurance in Connecticut. According to the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut, residents bear the burden of a broken health care system. Based on their findings, health care spending in Connecticut reached almost \$15 billion in 2005 while failing to use millions of federal dollars available. The LPRAC, based on testimony presented to the LPRAC on November 15th, 2006 by Mr. Juan Figueroa, President of the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut, agrees that all legislative discussions on this subject must include the following principle: Universal Health Care should be an affordable and sustainable system for all.

Medication Switching

The widespread practice of cost-driven drug switching is a practice that is endangering the health and wellbeing of the Latino community across the state of Connecticut. With this relatively new and dangerous practice, health insurers pay doctors in cash and offer other incentives for them to switch the prescriptions of patients to cheaper drugs often without informing their patients. Another alarming tactic in this cost-driven drug switching practice occurs when pressure is put on pharmacists to switch medications prescribed by a patient's doctor without consulting the doctor. As recently as May 27, 2008, Attorney General Richard Blumenthal announced that Connecticut would receive \$173,696 from a \$9.5 million national settlement with Express Scripts, Inc. to settle allegations that it urged doctors to switch their patients' drugs in order to benefit its own bottom line. This practice, in the guise of short term savings for low income people may result in long term disadvantages such as greater use of emergency rooms and longer term health consequences. Medicines intended to treat the same condition have different active ingredients and work in different ways. The free flow of information between doctor and patient is sacrosanct. Switching drugs without consulting the patient's doctor is not only unethical,

but a highly dangerous practice. The Latino community in Connecticut faces an abundance of health related disadvantages; among them is the paucity of medical interpreters in the health care system, few Spanish speaking health professionals, and limited access to primary care. LPRAC is alarmed by this practice that so endangers the health of Connecticut's Latino community. We are prepared to support legislation that will begin an end to this practice that endangers our community.

Interpreter Services under Medicaid

The LPRAC will continue monitoring the newly adopted Public Act No. 08-01, which contains federal matching funds for Interpreter Services under Medicaid. This new bill requires the commissioner of the Department of Social Services (DSS) to expedite amending the state plan to include these interpreters as Medicaid covered services by June 30, 2009. Last session, these services were cut and the LPRAC in conjunction with a large coalition of experts on this field, reported to the CGA that there is significant data available that identified language barriers among one of the most serious problems affecting Latinos in the state. And there is a U.S. Civil Rights decision that would fine DSS for not providing the services.

Economic Development

Latinos represent an increasing share of workers and taxpayers in Connecticut, yet they are overwhelmingly vulnerable to economic downturns and experience high poverty rates, especially among working families with children. The unemployment rate for Latinos in Connecticut according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data released in 2007 via the American Community Survey reached 7.6%. In Connecticut 21% of the overall Latino population is living below the poverty line in a state with the highest cost of living in the country. Finally, according to a study prepared by the Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy, low and middle-income families in Connecticut pay a considerable higher share of their income in state and local taxes than their wealthier counterparts.

Consequently, the LPRAC supports legislation that facilitates economic growth and prosperity. The LPRAC recommends the implementation of a 100% refundable State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) designed to help low-income families achieve self-sufficiency. Currently, 20 states including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and Vermont have state EITC's. For comparison purposes, the Federal EITC is a tax benefit for working people with low or moderate incomes and has broad support from both political parties in Connecticut. For instance, on February 1 of 2007, a spokesperson for the Internal Revenue Service, announced that Governor M. Jodi Rell issued a proclamation to recognize February 1 as Earned Income Tax Credit Day in the State of Connecticut. The LPRAC will continue to work to gain the support of the governor and the CGA on the establishment of a state EITC.

Housing

The sub-prime lending debacle has caused chaos among homeowners and renters alike in the State of Connecticut. Connecticut has established some relief to renters in the form of more stringent forms of notice to renters in foreclosure housing as well as an extension of the time tenants may remain in foreclosed properties. These improvements are a step in the right direction, however, much remains to be done to rescue families from this foreclosure crisis.

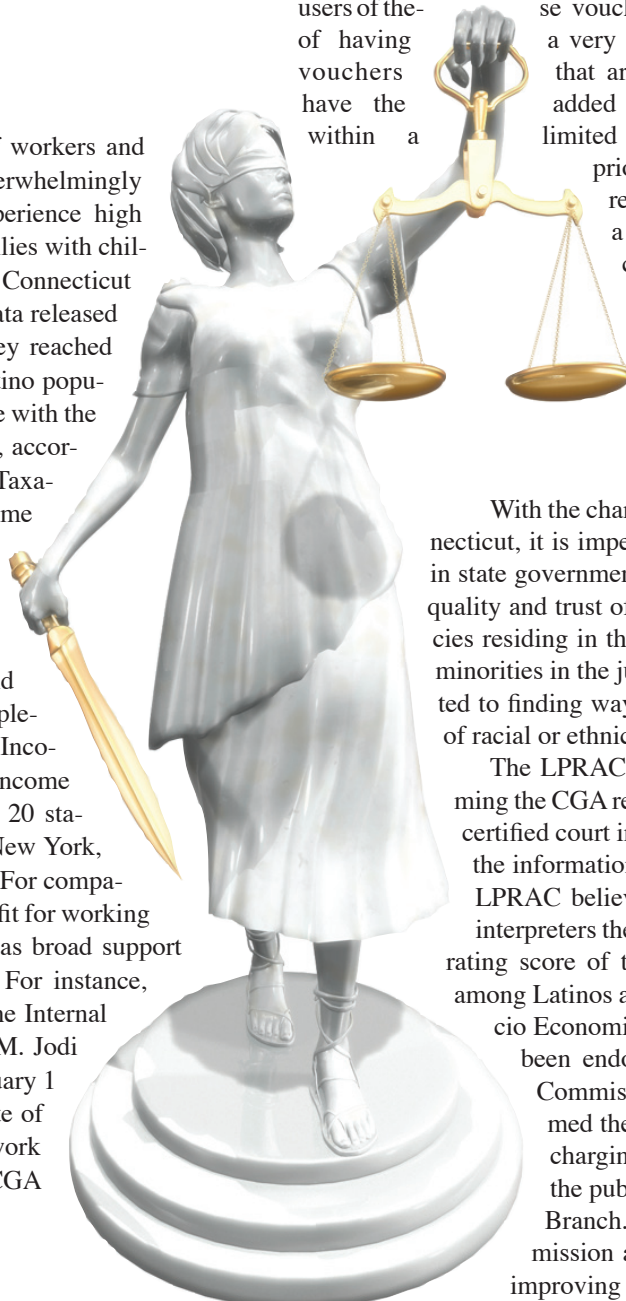
LPRAC is greatly invested in stabilizing Latino communities that are among the hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis. Concentrated foreclosures in Latino communities across Connecticut have left hundreds of properties vacant or abandoned. This creates an environment that not only increases crime but also decreases property values in already poor neighborhoods. This weakens the tax base and reduces the ability of cities to provide public services. LPRAC will support legislation that provides grants and/or loans to communities or agencies that would purchase foreclosed properties and rehabilitate them for resale or rental. This would significantly decrease the decline of property values while providing stable and affordable housing for the Latino community.

Another segment of the Latino community that has been hit hard by the foreclosure crisis are renters that use federal Section 8 housing vouchers. Many in the Connecticut Latino community are users of these vouchers that have the unfortunate element of having a very limited life span. Renters of Section 8 vouchers that are caught in the foreclosure nightmare have the added challenge of finding adequate housing within a limited timetable. Legislation at the state level prioritizing Section 8 foreclosure renters to receive rehabilitated housing would be a win-win scenario for both renter and community. LPRAC will encourage and support such legislation in the upcoming session.

Access and Trust in the Legal System

With the changing demographics in the State of Connecticut, it is imperative to make the appropriate changes in state government to be able to maintain or improve the quality and trust of services provided to all its constituencies residing in the State, especially for racial and ethnic minorities in the judicial system. The LPRAC is committed to finding ways to decreasing the disparate treatment of racial or ethnic populations in the Judicial System.

The LPRAC is on the record for many years informing the CGA regarding the need to hire and retain more certified court interpreters in order to improve access to the information provided by the Judicial Branch. The LPRAC believes that by hiring more qualified court interpreters the State may help improve the low "trust" rating score of the Connecticut Judicial Court System among Latinos as measured by the LPRAC's Latino Socio Economic Status Report – An issue that has also been endorsed by the Public Service and Trust Commission. Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers formed the Public Service and Trust Commission, charging it with developing a plan to enhance the public's trust and confidence in the Judicial Branch. The outcome objectives of this Commission are in line with the LPRAC's efforts to improving equal treatment of Latinos in the



Judicial System. The LPRAC, therefore, will endeavor to work with the Judicial Branch and the CGA on developing a strategy to hire and retain more court interpreters, more bilingual and bicultural Judicial Branch staff and securing the appropriate funds in the Appropriations Committee of the CGA.

The LPRAC is an official working member of the Racial and Ethnic Disparity Commission in the Criminal Justice System (REDCCJS) at the helm of Judge Lubbie Harper Jr. This Commission has recently conducted a large forum on Disparity in Connecticut with the objective of developing an agenda aimed at decreasing racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system. The final report with the legislative recommendations prepared for the REDCCJS will be announced at the beginning of the 2009 session. The LPRAC, in addition to these recommendations, will also advocate in collaboration with the Black and Latino Caucus on strategies to increase the low number of judges that are of Latino descent. Currently, out of 196 judges in the Supreme, Appellate, and Superior Court only 5 are of Latino descent or about 2.5% within a growing Latino population at about 11.5% of the overall population.

Immigration

The LPRAC is in support of legislation that would allow children who live in Connecticut and attend high school for four years in Connecticut and graduate from a Connecticut high school to pay in-state tuition fees to attend state public colleges and universities, regardless of their immigration status. The students would be required to file an affidavit with the college stating that they would apply for citizenship as soon as they were eligible. For the record, the students in question were brought to this country by their parents. Many are honors students with great hopes for higher education. If they were born in the U.S. they are citizens but if not their status is determined by that of their parents. If their parents have no immigration documents the students

cannot apply for legal status without triggering a process of rejection of their application that would normally lead to an order to leave the country by a certain date. They are not eligible for state or federal financial aid – this bill would not change that situation – and most cannot afford to pay out-of-state tuition. All the court decisions – both in Kansas and California – have rejected challenges to this bill, the fiscal note both in Texas and Massachusetts have concluded that there would be no cost to the state as a result of this bill.

In Connecticut the LPRAC in conjunction with a large community of activists in support of immigrant rights was able to successfully pass this legislation through the Connecticut General Assembly in 2007; unfortunately the final proposal was vetoed by the Governor. A poll released in May 2nd of 2007 released jointly by the Hartford Courant and the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut indicated that the majority of Connecticut residents supported easing the path to college for undocumented immigrants living in the state.

The LPRAC is also working on a legislative task force looking at domestic violence issues on immigrant communities. The membership of this work group consists of State Representatives Fox (D-146th District), Tom Reynolds (D-142nd District), Senator John Kissel (R-7th Senatorial District), and State Representatives Andres Ayala (D-128th, District) and Kelvin Roldan (D-4th District) in addition to State officials from the Department of Public Safety, a representative of the Judicial Department, and representatives from the following organizations: Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, Connecticut Catholic Conference, CT Immigrant and Refugee Coalition, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the Office of State Victim Advocate. The work of the task force has been focused on current domestic violence laws, current assistance available to victims, and it will decide the need for policy change. The LPRAC will review the possibility of increasing the capacity of shelters to victims of domestic violence and services to victims' twenty-four hours and seven days a week.

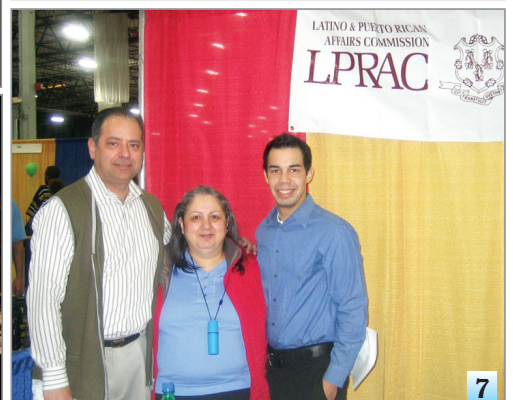
Latino Population Estimate:
The Latino population based on the latest U.S. Census Bureau data released in 2007 is that out of the total 3,502,309 people in CT, there are 403,375 Latinos or 11.5 percent living in the state.

Latino Infant Mortality Rate:
8.9 percent Source: CT Dept. of Public Health, Vital Statistics, Registration Report.

Latino Dropout Rate: 4.4 percent. Source: Latest available data released by the State Department of Education.

Latino Unemployment Rate: 10.3 percent. Source: LPRAC's internal reviews

Latino Insurance Coverage: 36 percent of Latinos don't have insurance in Connecticut.





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